Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

News Release

April 2, 2008

Financial eligibility for legal aid to reflect inflation

Vancouver, BC — The Legal Services Society on April 1 implemented the first of what will become annual adjustments to legal aid financial eligibility guidelines based on cost of living increases.

"We've taken this step to protect potential clients from falling by the wayside just because of inflation," says Executive Director Mark Benton. "If someone was eligible for our advice or representation services a couple of years ago, and inflation is the only thing that's altered their net income since then, that by itself shouldn't make them ineligible today," he explains.

LSS last adjusted its financial eligibility guidelines for inflation in 2005. To reflect the British Columbia Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases since then, the society will raise its guidelines by about 3% this year (see chart, below)

Future eligibility levels will be adjusted annually using the provincial CPI. Those changes will be calculated for the 12 month period ending December 31, using data published by BC Stats each January. Adjustments will take effect the following April 1, giving staff time to implement the relevant policy, computer system, and publications updates. Increases will be capped at 5% to avoid excessive costs in any given year.

Financial eligibility guidelines are based on household size, income (minus specific deductions), and assets. LSS restructured the guidelines in October 2005, using the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as adjusted for inflation announced the previous May.

The MBM is an estimate of how much it costs to buy a specific basket of goods and services in different communities across Canada. It was developed by Human Resources and Social Development Canada in consultation with the provinces and territories and is generally accepted as a cost-based definition of poverty.

For further information, please see the attached backgrounder and/or refer to our financial eligibility fact sheet.

For interviews, please contact:

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LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979.

Legal representation is available for serious family, child protection, and criminal issues. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal advice is available at most courts through duty counsel and by telephone through LawLINE and the Brydges Line (both are province-wide toll-free lines).

Legal information is available through Legal Information Outreach Worker (LIOW) services, LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Family Law in BC, LSS, and LawLINK websites. (See www.lss.bc.ca for most of our publications, our catalogue, and website links.)

*To contact the **LSS Call Centre** and **LawLINE**, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).*